

BRIEFING NOTE FOR MINISTER

Ref: 96424

FOR INFORMATION

Date: May 21, 2003

Topic: First Peoples Language Initiatives

Purpose: To provide information for presentation to the Open Cabinet meeting on May 30, 2003.

Issue Summary: Information is provided on actions taken by the Province to preserve and promote Aboriginal languages in BC, in partnership with the First Peoples' Cultural Foundation and First Peoples' Heritage Language and Culture Council.

Background/Description:

The New Era document contained a commitment to preserve and promote Aboriginal languages. The government has taken concrete steps to implement this commitment.

This year the provincial government is providing \$870,000 to the First Peoples' Heritage, Language and Culture Program to support a wide variety of community-based language preservation projects throughout the province. The government has committed to increase this annual funding support to \$1,000,000 annually, beginning in April 2004. The funding for this program will come from the First Citizens Fund, a perpetual fund established to support Aboriginal economic, social, cultural, and educational activities.

The government made a commitment in the New Era document to double the First Citizens Fund from \$36 million to \$72 million by April 1, 2004. Three installments have now been completed. This injection of funds has enabled the province to engage in partnerships and undertake initiatives aimed at preserving and promoting indigenous BC languages. Interest earned by the First Citizens Fund, which will reach approximately \$3.9 million by 2004, supports a variety of programs in addition to the language program.

In addition to the above ongoing support for indigenous languages, the Province has also supported the development of a first ever, web-based language archiving and teaching tool called **FirstVoices.com**. FirstVoices.com is based on revolutionary technology that is sought after nationally and internationally. Provincial support totaling \$450,000 over the past two fiscal years has provided developmental funding to the First Peoples' Cultural Foundation to develop this technology.

The concept of utilizing web technology to improve language teaching and archiving originated with two teachers working at Lau, welnew Tribal School in Saanich. After two years of development by the First Peoples' Cultural Foundation, the technology is now ready to launch. **FirstVoices.com** will be officially launched on June 19, 2003, at Lau, welnew Tribal School in celebration of National Aboriginal Day.

A preliminary version of the program was tested at workshops involving linguists and language teachers at the University of Victoria and in Kamloops during the summer of 2002. Refinements to the program from these and other trials have now been incorporated into the version that will be launched on June 19th. Minister Abbott is scheduled to attend along with officials from the First Peoples' Cultural Foundation and First Nations/Aboriginal representatives.

FirstVoices is an innovative tool that will enable Aboriginal people and their communities to record, teach, preserve and utilize their languages. An important element of FirstVoices.com is that people living away from their home communities will be able to participate in language learning activities through an internet connection. Based upon community wishes all recorded information on their language can be password protected.

This revolutionary technology has already received considerable national and international interest including significant interest from Aboriginal communities in California and agencies in Australia. The project has also received private sector support from Apple Computers, Hewlett Packard and Shaw Cable. Other partnerships continue to be developed.

Policy Considerations and Advice:

FirstVoices.com provides an excellent example of the work of the Aboriginal Directorate of CAWS. Targeted ministry resources have helped a community organization expand upon a concept initiated by teachers in an Aboriginal school into a world class technology. Private sector supporters have recognized the power of this new technological tool and have contributed to the effort. FirstVoices will be seen as a successful collaboration of the provincial government, the Aboriginal community and the private sector. The launch of **FirstVoices.com** on June 19, 2003, as part of our recognition of National Aboriginal Day (June 21st) will be something we can all celebrate.

Contact: John Harper, Director, Social & Economic Initiatives, (250) 387-2536

Date of last revision: n/a **Date of latest review:** n/a

Date of original note: May 21, 2003

Further information to follow:

Approvals for Briefing Note			
EXEC.DIR	<u> L. Nye </u>	ADM	<u> P. Khare </u> CB _____ DM _____